

Message Text

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EXDIS - MILITARY ADDRESSEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

FOLLOWING MESSAGE SENT SECSTATE WASHDC FROM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
22 JAN 75:

QUOTE S E C R E T BANGKOK 1223

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS CINCPAC AND SECDEF

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, TH

SUBJ: US-RTG DISCUSSIONS ON U.S. FORCE LEVELS

REF: A. BANGKOK 1172

B. STATE 012825

C. BANGKOK 0443

D. BANGKOK 1140

1. FOLLOWING DISCUSSION ON RENEGOTIATION OF THE U.S.-THAI
ECONOMIC AID AGREEMENT (SEPTTEL), FOREIGN MINISTER CHARUNPHAN
TOLD AMBASSADOR KINTNER DURING MEETING ON JANUARY 22, THAT
HE WANTED ALSO TO DISCUSS THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN
THAILAND. CHARUNPHAN SAID HE WAS AWARE OF THE FACT THAT
DCM MASTERS HAD DISCUSSED THIS MATTER THE PREVIOUS DAY WITH
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GENERAL KRIT (REF D) AND THAT HE FULLY UNDERSTOOD OUR
SITUATION. HE SAID HE RECOGNIZED THAT, BECAUSE OF THE
CURRENT SITUATIONS IN VIET NAM AND CAMBODIA, WE MUST BE
"CAUTIOUS" AND "CANNOT MOVE RAPIDLY REGARDING U.S. REDUCTIONS."

2. AT THE SAME TIME, CHARUNPHAN SAID WE MUST RECOGNIZE HIS PROBLEM. ON HIS RETURN FROM NEW YORK LAST OCTOBER, FOLLOWING DISCUSSIONS WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER* CHARUNPHAN TOLD THE PRESS THERE WOULD BE FURTHER CONSULTATIONS REGARDING U.S. FORCE REDUCTIONS AFTER COMPLETION OF THE 1974 AGREED WITHDRAWAL PACKAGE. THE PRESS HAS CONTINUED TO QUESTION HIM ON THIS AND HE BELIEVES IT IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY THAT HE BE ABLE TO SAY THAT CONSULTATIONS HAVE BEEN HELD BEFORE HE LEAVES OFFICE. CHARUNPHAN SAID HE AND KRIT HAD AGREED THAT THERE SHOULD BE A PUBLIC STATEMENT FOLLOWING A MEETING ON U.S. FORCE REDUCTIONS BUT THAT THIS STATEMENT SHOULD CLEARLY SAY THAT WE WERE POSTPONING CONSIDERATION OF FURTHER WITHDRAWALS BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION IN THE AREA.

3. AMBASSADOR KINTNER REVIEWED IN DETAIL THE CURRENT SECURITY SITUATIONS IN SOUTH VIET NAM AND CAMBODIA AND QUOTED FROM SECRETARY SCHLESINGER'S JANUARY 14 PRESS CONFERENCE REGARDING THE ESSENTIAL NEED THAT WE AVOID GIVING ANY WRONG SIGNALS TO HANOI. HE CITED ALSO THE PRESIDENT'S JANUARY 20 STATEMENT WHICH CLEARLY LEFT THE DOOR OPEN FOR A RESUMPTION OF THE BOMBING, IF THIS WERE DEEMED NECESSARY, FOLLOWING THE NECESSARY APPROVAL BY THE CONGRESS AS WELL AS CONCURRENCE OF THE RTG FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF UAF AIRCRAFT DEPLOYED IN THAILAND.

4. AMBASSADOR KINTNER EMPHASIZED THAT A JOINT U.S.-THAI MEETING ON THIS SUBJECT MIGHT WELL BE MISUNDERSTOOD BY HANOI AND MIGHT, IN FACT, ENCOURAGE HANOI TO STEP UP ITS AGGRESSION IN SOUTH VIET NAM. STRESSING THAILAND'S OWN INTERESTS IN THE STABILITY OF CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIET NAM, THE AMBASSADOR ARGUED STRONGLY AGAINST ANY MEETING AT THIS TIME TO CONSIDER THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE. CHARUNPHAN REPEATED HIS EARLIER COMMITMENT TO THE PRESS AND INSISTED THAT A MEETING OF THE U.S.-THAI WORKING GROUP MUST BE HELD ON JANUARY 23 OR 24. HE AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT THE STATEMENT ISSUED FOLLOWING THIS MEETING SHOULD NOT INDICATE THERE
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WOULD BE ANY U.S. MILITARY REDUCTIONS AT THIS TIME.

5. AMBASSADOR KINTNER THEN ATTEMPTED TO PERSUADE CHARUNPHAN TO CONSIDER THEIR MEETING AS CONSTITUTING CONSULTATION ON THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE AND TO AGREE TO ISSUE A STATEMENT ALONG THE LINES PROPOSED REF D. CHARUNPHAN REJECTED THIS WITH THE COMMENT THAT "HE WAS NOT A MILITARY MAN AND NOT CAPABLE OF JUDGING THE MILITARY SITUATION." HE AGAIN INSISTED THAT TALKS MUST BE HELD IN THE SAME FORUM AS LAST YEAR WITH GENERAL KRIANGSAK SERVING AS CHAIRMAN ON THE THAI SIDE. AMBASSADOR KINTNER AND THE DCM STRESSED THAT IF A MEETING OF THIS GROUP WAS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL, IT MUST TAKE PLACE IMMEDIATELY. OTHERWISE, PRESS SPECULATION WOULD GROW AS A

RESULT OF THE MEETING BETWEEN THE AMBASSADOR AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND THE RTG WOULD FIND IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO ISSUE A STATEMENT TO THE EFFECT THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER REDUCTIONS AT THIS TIME. CHARUNPHAN AGREED AND, FOLLOWING DETERMINATION BY HIS STAFF THAT RENERAL KRIANGSAK WAS AVAILABLE, THE MEETING WAS SCHEDUWED FOR 3:00 P.M. THAT SAME AFTERNOON.

6. AFTER SOME ADDITIONAL EXCHANGE, AGREEMENT WAS REACHED ON THE SCENARIO OUTLINED IN REF A. THAT IS, THE FOREIGN MINISTER WOULD ISSUE A STATEMENT SHORTLY AFTER AMBASSADOR KINTNER LEFT TO THE EFFECT THAT AN URGENT MEETING OF THE THAI-U.S. WORKING GROUP WOULD TAKE PLACE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO REVIEW THE SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. THIS WOULD BE FOLLOWED THAT AFTERNOON BY A MEETING OF THE THAI-U.S. COORDINATION GROUP. THE FOREIGN MINISTER AGREED THAT THE STATEMENT TO BE ISSUED FOLLOWING THIS MEETING WOUWD BE ALONG LINES PROPOSED REF C, AS APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENT IN REF B.

7. IN THE RTG THE AGREED SCENARIO IS RARELY FOLLOWED. CHARUNPHAN DID HOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE THIS AFTERNOON. HE DISCUSSED THE MATTER OF U.S. FORCE LEVELS BUT DID NOT HEW TO THE LINE WE HAD AGREED TO THIS MORNING (REF D). SO FAR WE HAVE THREE VERSIONS OF WHAT HE SAID WHICH MAY CONFUSE THE REPORTERS SUFFICIENTLY TO LIMIT DAMAGE TO OUR POSITION.

8. ALL REPORTS AGREE THAT CHARUNPHAN SAID HE HOPED THERE
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WOULD BE A MEETING OF THE THAI-U.S. WORKING GROUP BEFORE THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT LEAVES OFFICE AND THAT ANY DECISION REGARDING U.S. WITHDRAWALS WOULD BE HEWD OVER FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT. ACCORDING TO SEVERAL ACCOUNTS HE ALSO ASKED HOW U.S. TROOPS COULD WITHDRAW FROM THAILAND CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY IS STILL IN SOUTH VIET NAM. HE IS QUOTED AS SAYING, "THAILAND IS WORRIED ABOUT NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS IN SOUTH VIET NAM." AP ADDS THAT CHARUNPHAN SAID HE WOULD TELL THE NEW GOVERNMENT THAT IN HIS VIEW THE PRESENCE OF U.S. TROOPS IN THAILAND DOES NOT VIOLATE THE VIETNAMESE PEACE ACCORDS.

9. MEANWHILE, AT THREE O'CLOCK A MEETING OF THE THAI-U.S. COORDINATING GROUP BEGAN AT SUPREME COMMAND BETWEEN CHIEF OF STAFF SUPREME COMMAND GENERAL KRIANGSAK CHOMANAN, ASA SARASIN FROM MFA, COMUSMACTHAI MAJGEN HIXON, POMIL COUNSELOR RICHARD BOEHM AND REPORTING STAFFS. AFTER THREE HOURS OF PULLING AND HAULING A GENERALLY SATISFACTORY SOLUTION HAS EMERGED. GENERAL KRIANGSAK HAS AGREED TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT:

"IN CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSIONS, A MEETING OF THE

THAI-US COORDINATING COMMITTEE WAS HELD AT SUPREME COMMAND HEADQUARTERS ON JANUARY 22, 1975. THE GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION AT PRESENT IN THE AREA WAS REVIEWED. DUE TO THE INTENSIFICATION OF THE CONFLICT IN BOTH CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIET NAM, IT WAS AGREED THAT COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS WOULD CONTINUE. NO DISCUSSION OF FUTURE LEVELS OF U.S. FORCES STATIONED ON ROYAL THAI MILITARY BASES WAS HELD AT THE MEETING."

10. KRIANGSAK OBTAINED PRIME MINISTER'S ORAL APPROVAL BY PHONE AND EXPECTS MAKE STATEMENT TO PRESS AT 1930 LOCAL JANUARY 22. HE WILL ADVISE EMBASSY WHEN STATEMENT HAS BEEN MADE AFTER WHICH WE WILL BE FREE USE IT OURSELVES. WE WILL INFORM DEPARTMENT NIACT IMMEDIATE WHEN KRIANGSAK STATEMENT IS MADE.

11. DESPITE HEAVY PRESSURE FROM U.S. SIDE, KRIANGSAK REFUSED ACCEPT PRESS STATEMENT TO EFFECT TWO SIDES HAD AGREED THERE SHOULD BE NO U.S. REDUCTIONS UNDER
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PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES. HE SAID THIS WOULD GIVE THAI PUBLIC IMPRESSION FURTHER U.S. REDUCTIONS WERE CLOSED BOOK, AND WOULD RESULT IN INTERNAL DISTURBANCES THAT WOULD REVERBERATE AGAINST U.S. INSTALLATIONS IN THAILAND. THIS POSITION PROVED UNSHAKABLE, BUT WE WERE ABLE TO MOVE HIM OFF HIS ORIGINAL VIEW THAT NO STATEMENT OF ANY KIND SHOULD BE MADE. WE BELIEVE OUTCOME IS AS SATISFACTORY AS OBTAINABLE, ESPECIALLY SINCE IT PUTS QUESTION OF U.S. FORCE LEVELS CLEARLY IN CONTEXT OF THAI-U.S. CONCERN OVER CURRENT INDOCHINA SITUATION.

12. IF QUESTIONED AS TO WHY NO DISCUSSIONS WERE HELD AT THIS MEETING ON FUTURE FORCE LEVELS KRIANGSAK WILL COVER THE CRITICAL SITUATION CREATED BY NORTH VIET NAM IN BOTH SOUTH VIET NAM AND CAMBODIA. THIS OUTCOME MAY NOT PROVE TOO BAD.

13. COMMENT: (A) THE SCENARIO REPORTED IN THIS CABLE AND EARLIER IN REF (A) REVEALS THE WOBBLY AND FAINT-HEARTED CHARACTER OF THE PRESENT RTG DURING THE LAST DAYS OF THE SANYA GOVERNMENT. I AM DISAPPOINTED IN CHARUNPHAN'S PERFORMANCE. HE CATEGORICALLY ASSURED ME THIS MORNING THAT HE WOULD MAKE THE STATEMENT REPORTED IN REF (A).

(B2 I CAN ONLY SURMISE THAT SOME OF CHARUNPHAN'S SUBORDINATES IN THE MFA SUBSEQUENTLY CONVINCED HIM THAT HE SHOULD WAFFLE THIS ONE. MANY OF THE YOUNGER OFFICERS IN THE MFA HAVE BEEN SEDUCED BY THANAT'S OFT-REPEATED ARGUMENT THAT U.S. FORCES SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN FROM THAILAND SINCE THEY IMPEDE BETTER RELATIONS WITH HANOI AND CONGRES-

SIONAL RESTRICTIONS MAKE IT UNLIKELY THAT THEY WILL BE EMPLOYED IN VIET NAM, EVEN IN EXTREMIS. THIS VIEW, FREQUENTLY VOICED BY SOME MEMBERS OF U.S. CONGRESS, U.S. JOURNALISTS AND EX-AMBASSADOR REISCHAUER, IS CONSTANTLY REITERATED BY VOICFEROUS PROFESSORS, STUDENT LEADERS AND NATIONALIST JOURNALISTS. ONLY YESTERDAY A PARTICULARLY ARTFUL DEMAND THAT WE WITHDRAW OUR FORCES FROM THAILAND APPEARED IN THE GEN- EARLLY REASONABLE BANGKOK POST.

(C) WE DO NOT YET KNOW WHAT THE INTERPLAY WAS AMONG KRIT,
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CHARUNPHAN AND THE PRIME MINISTER. IN ANY EVENT, KRIANGSAK INITIALLY RESISTED ANY STATEMENT FROM THE U.S.-THAI WORKING GROUP; WE COULD NOT LIVE WITH THIS, AND AFTER A GREAT DEAL OF TOUGH NEGOTIATING, GENERAL KRIANGSAK FINALLY CAME AROUND TO A GENERALLY ACCEPTABLE STATEMENT WHICH MAY BE STRENGTHENED BY HIS RESPONSE TO QUESTIONING BY THE PRESS.

(D) REST ASSURED THAT WE PULLED OUT EVERY STOP ON THE ORGAN, STRESSING PINTS CONTAINED IN REF (B), REINFORCING THEM WITH EXCELLENT STATEMENTS MADE BY SECRETARY SCHLESINGER ON JANUARY 14, AS WELL AS BY PRESIDENT FORD ON JANUARY 20. CHARUNPHAN WAS READY TO STAND AT THE BARRICADE WITH US UNTIL HE CONTEMPLATED THE HEADLINES ATTACKING SUCH RE- SOLUTION. A CATEGORICAL STATEMENT AGAINST EVEN DISCUSSING REDUCTIONS AT THIS TIME COULD BE READILY TWISTED BY THE THAI PRESS INTO AN ALLEGED SURRENDER OF THAI SOVEREIGNTY.

14. WE WILL SEND YOU A FURTHER ANALYSIS AFTER THE DUST SETTLES. KINTNER UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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